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CONSTABLE & CO. LTD., LONDON

THE FIELD OF HONOUR

BY

H. FIELDING-HALL

AUTHOR OF

"THE SOUL OF A PEOPLE," ETC.

LONDON
CONSTABLE & CO. LTD.

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THE CALL AND THE ANSWER

THE CALL AND THE ANSWER

WHEN the harvest time was
near,
When the wheat was in the
ear

And the fruit was growing mellow with
the kisses of the sun,
Through the lazy dreamy haze
Of those golden summer days,
From the East there echoed suddenly the
warning of a gun.

With a flash of lurid flame
Right across the sea it came,
And its echoes broke in thunder with the
surf along our shore,
Saying, "Give, be quick and Give,
Every nation that would live
Must spend life and blood and treasure, or
must die for evermore."

THE CALL & THE ANSWER

At the summons hoarse and deep
England raised herself from sleep
And looked out across the Channel to
the battle-field afar.

“Did I hear a gun?” she said,
“I have fleets, I’m not afraid.
I will give my ships and seamen as my
sacrifice to war.”

So she turned to sleep again,
But from off the Flanders plain
Came the battle thunder louder, more
insistent in its call :

“If ye would that England live
Ye must Give and Give and Give,
For I cannot sate my hunger with a
sacrifice so small.”

All the island breezes heard,
All the winds took up the word,
And they spread it from the Channel to
the far off western sea :

THE CALL & THE ANSWER

“If you would that England live
You must Give and Give and Give.
You must pay the price of freedom that
your island still be free.”

All the English heard the call
From the noble in his hall,
From the merchant at his counter to the
banker by his till,
From the shepherd on the downs
To the shopman in the towns,
To the miner in his gallery and mill-hand
in his mill.

Gallant lads in thousands came.
“War,” they said, “is but a game.
We will play for England’s honour while
our bodies hold our breath.
All our boyish days are done,
Change our bat into a gun.
You must give us shells for footballs and
we’ll kick the goals of death.”

THE CALL & THE ANSWER

Still the summons did not cease :

“ Would you keep your island peace
Then the wife must give her husband and
the father give his son.

You must send to me as food
Of your dearest flesh and blood
And I'll drink the tears of orphans,” said
the angry battle gun,

Then rose England in her might,
“ Tell me straight and tell me right
All the things the Battle needeth, tell me
now and tell me plain.

Do not think I'll be afraid
Of whatever words are said ;
Now I know the need is urgent you
won't have to ask again.

“ Is it treasure, bring the scale ;
Is it soldiers, tell the tale ;
Is it sweat of workmen working till their
hands can't toil no more ?

THE CALL & THE ANSWER

Do not echo Give and Give,
Take your fill, but while I live
You must keep the ancient freedom of
the seas about my shore."

HOW BRADFORD REJOINED HIS REGIMENT

HOW BRADFORD REJOINED HIS REGIMENT

I

THE inn at the top of the market-place was not new at the time of the Wars of the Roses, when Godolphin was shot in its porch ; the church, rebuilt in the sixteenth century, is said to have been originally built in the twelfth century, and the market cross is so old that no one can give it a date ; but the market-place itself is older far than any of them.

When the Normans came here they found a Saxon village ; and the Saxons, when they came, found Britons here. They say that the monuments on the moor were raised three thousand years ago, and that some of the men who built them lived in this village. It is one of the oldest

HOW BRADFORD REJOINED

villages in the oldest part of England—the West Country, where Arthur lived.

Even now there is not much that is modern in the village. The main street is still called *Holy Street*, and the market-place is paved with cobbles at the side. There is no railway, and the news comes still by coach—a motor-coach, but still a coach.

In the early morning the market-place awoke in busy mood. The little shops were opened ; there were boys who passed with milk and bread, and the children clattered along to school. Then it relapsed into emptiness and silence for a while, to fill again before eleven. But this time the people were different, and their purpose not apparent.

Two or three dogcarts drove in and waited along one side, and there was a motor-car ; men and women came along the road from the little villas built beyond the church ; shopkeepers appeared at their

HOW BRADFORD REJOINED

doors. The curate arrived, the doctor from his surgery ; the one policeman found that he had duty there ; some workmen momentarily left their work and came. So that when the church clock pointed to eleven there may have been fifty people in the place, standing about, waiting and doing nothing. They did not even talk. They waited.

They waited for news of the war, just as men and women had waited there in bygone centuries for news of bygone wars, of Cressy, of Agincourt, of the Great Armada, of Malplaquet and Ramillies, of Sedgemoor, of Trafalgar and Vittoria and Waterloo, of the Alma, of the Mutiny, of Pretoria. If the stones of that market-place could speak ! It is likely enough that there were men from here in all those wars, soldiers, perhaps, seamen most certainly, for the young men from here, rich or poor, did not go either to great towns or to America, but always

HOW BRADFORD REJOINED

to the King's service. It was a tradition.

So whatever war was on, the market-place was always interested, and waited for the coach to bring news of it to them along always the same road. From the market-place you could see a piece of the road as it crossed the shoulder of hill before dipping down to rise again to the village. In the old days the coach was drawn by horses, and when it brought news of victory it was decorated with flags. So had come the news of Waterloo and the fall of Delhi. Nowadays the coach had neither horses nor flags. But no matter. They were but details under which the human reality remained the same.

Then, with a noise and rattle, the motor-coach rounded the corner, snorted up the hill, and drew up at the post-office. The bundle of papers was thrown off and it went on.

And now indeed the people were alive.

HOW BRADFORD REJOINED

They thronged the street, the doorway whence the papers would be issued ; they formed a queue that extended past the lich-gate of the churchyard. They were excited, anxious, but silent still.

And each one, as he got his paper, just went away a few yards from the throng and opened it. What news of the war to-day ? The scanty bulletin was quickly read, and they formed in little groups and talked.

“ Well, and what do you think of it ? ” the doctor asked.

Colonel Bradford shook his head. “ Not good,” he said, “ not good. They tell us little, and behind that little there is much—untold. Not good. Except always that they are gallant lads.”

“ No news of Dick ? ”

“ None since the card last week, and that only to say he was well.”

“ And what more do you want ? ” said the doctor cheerily. “ He will keep well,

HOW BRADFORD REJOINED

and one day he will come back and tell us all about it, eh ? ”

The old man brightened up and smiled. “I hope so. Yes.” Then, as a friend beckoned to him, he said, “There’s Stevens, impatient as usual. Are you coming ? ”

The doctor shook his head and went away, and Bradford joined three other friends, old retired officers like himself, and together they went to the inn. There they had a map upon the wall of the bar parlour, and each day when news came they moved the flags. Then they discussed the situation, and then the little coterie of veterans parted. Each went home to tell his family, to read the paper through and through again, and so pass the day—for indeed their day held little else for them than this.

Bradford had not far to go—just up Holy Street and to the right, and he came to his cottage. There was a garden at the

HOW BRADFORD REJOINED

front and back, and that was all he cared for. That the cottage was but small never occurred to him, never had occurred to him even when, over twenty years ago, he had come here with his wife and baby boy—never would occur to him. Such things mattered to him not at all. Money, luxury, reputation, advancement, amusement, all these things which are so much to most men, had never been anything to him. Even his wife, although he loved her, had not been much. For most of his life there had been only one thing that mattered—his regiment, and what he could do for it ; still there was but one—the regiment and his son who served in it.

When, at forty-five, he had been obliged to retire, all desire of life went out. To go at forty-five, a young man still—and why ? The doctors said his heart was bad—they said that all the malaria and hardships of an Indian frontier campaign

HOW BRADFORD REJOINED

had so affected it that it was too weak to do its duty. Taken care of, it might last him many years, but a sudden strain might burst it. What matter that? Let it fail and break and make an end. But leave the army? No.

And when they made him go he nearly died. For he had no interest in life, no knowledge of life, no desire for life. He was a soldier, and when he ceased to be a soldier he ceased to be anything—so it seemed to him. He was motiveless in a world he neither knew nor cared for. Why live on?

And indeed he probably would have died through sheer unhappiness if his wife had not married him. How it happened he didn't know. It was none of his doing. She simply came and took charge of him and married him, and that was all he knew. And having married him she tried to bring him back to life. She loved him and she hoped that her love and care would stir in

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him a new pleasure in life and that he would awaken. She studied him and tried to rouse him to some new work, something to take the place of the old regiment.

She failed. Bradford had, during all of his life that he could remember, lived to be a soldier ; since he had joined his regiment he had lived for it, and now he could not change. No new love could replace the old. The regiment and Bradford's heart were one.

But his wife was a wise woman and she still had hope. She still laughed ; she still was happy. She was not jealous that she could not replace the regiment in her husband's love. She tried no more to fight the old devotion. No. She had now a wiser plan : she would enlist it on her side. Then she would win. But meanwhile she would be silent and endure.

And so in truth her victory did come. It came one spring morning very early,

HOW BRADFORD REJOINED

when, the doctor having given leave, Bradford went on tiptoe to his wife's room. She lay exhausted on the bed, her face pale and twisted with the pain she had endured. But when she heard his step and felt him bending over her, she managed just to look at him and smile. And as he bent still lower, "Look," she whispered, and she moved her arm, "look at your new recruit—for the old regiment," and dropped into unconsciousness again. And as Bradford looked upon the tiny face it seemed to him that something of the glory of the spring without had come into the room—new life, new hope, new happiness.

From that moment Bradford was young again. His interest in life returned ; the tie with his old regiment, which he thought broken for ever, was renewed. The chain he thought had snapped, had only slipped from one link to another.

He was the soldier once again, the

HOW BRADFORD REJOINED

colonel with a recruit to train, a draft for the old regiment. Well, he must see about it. Here was work for him to do.

He did it. He wanted to begin at once indeed, and it required much persuasion from his wife to make him see that the recruit must be brought on slowly, and at first by her. He could superintend, of course, if it so pleased him, whistle bugle-calls to stop the recruit from crying, and carry him about in a martial manner. But the spare time Bradford could put in by getting himself up to date again. Drill was altering, and strategy and tactics, and if he was to bring up his recruit to be a good officer he must make himself a good teacher. He must study the history of the past and the evolution of the present. So all his interest in life returned and he became a happy man. He adored his son, and because his wife had given him this son he loved her ; and because she was still

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for many years to be the recruit's commanding officer he respected her. No other children came ; they were content with him they had. They lived in the boy. They left their house at the seaside and came to live in this village, to save money for his education and to help him when he joined. They cared nothing for themselves, only for him—to bring him up to be a worthy successor to a line of soldiers. And they succeeded. The boy grew up strong and active. He was not spoiled. And in due time Bradford's opportunity came and the boy grew up in an atmosphere of soldiering. He did not go out with his father for a walk, but for a route march ; he got up at *réveillé*, and at night "First post," "Second post," and "Lights out" followed each other in due succession. He learnt to ride and shoot as soon as he was strong enough. But above all he drank in with his very milk the essence of a

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soldier's duty. He learnt to obey orders not because he must, but because he wanted to, because the ability to obey simply, honestly and eagerly was a necessary step to being able to command. And he became imbued with the very spirit of soldiering, that of understanding that he did not live for himself nor to himself, but that he was but an item in a great whole, but a cell in a great organism whose purpose was to live and die gladly, freely, eagerly for his country. And in learning all this he learned also to regard his father not only as his father but as one with him in that both were soldiers, his father leading and he following on the road that leads to honour.

Thus they were friends as well as son and father because they marched along as comrades, soldiers of the King.

The boy did so well at school that his headmaster wanted to send him to Woolwich. But Bradford would not have it.

HOW BRADFORD REJOINED

Had he not been announced from the beginning as a recruit for the old regiment? So into the old regiment he must go. The boy passed out of Sandhurst, and in due time was gazetted to his father's regiment. He served a couple of years at home, then two in India, and the battalion had been at home again only a few months when war broke out. Then he was sent to France. The Bradfords received a post-card from Boulogne; then silence; and so we come to this day in September where we began.

II

BRADFORD walked slowly up to his front door. There was a wealth of creeper on the porch, and the roses were still in bloom, but he did not notice them. He was thinking always of the war—of the retreat from Mons, now at length known; of the battle of the Marne, now in full progress. His wife came out and met him.

“Well?” she said.

He shook his head. “We hold our own they say, Mary, and that is all they say. They will not tell us much.”

“And Dick is too busy to write,” she answered.

“Aye, aye,” said Bradford. “When you are using the sword and rifle all day the pen is forgotten. Don’t blame him, Mary.”

“I don’t,” she answered, “only I want to know. And Mrs. Allen heard last

HOW BRADFORD REJOINED

night that her boy was killed." Tears rose in her eyes.

"The fighting's hard," said Bradford. "I thought I had seen service, but it was nothing to this. The losses are terrible, they say. Whole regiments gone. But we will get through all right."

She did not answer, and the two stood there in silence gazing on the scene. The golden sunshine filled the valley to its brim, making the corn more golden and grass more green. There was a great peace that held the hills. She gazed upon them; and then her eyes came back to the road below. A boy on a red bicycle had just appeared. She gripped Bradford's arm, her heart grew cold.

"Harry," she said, "there is the telegraph boy."

"There are many wires nowadays," said Bradford. "It will be for Johnson. He is always getting them."

"But he has passed Johnson's house,"

HOW BRADFORD REJOINED

she whispered. "He is coming here. It is for us. O Harry, Harry."

There was a garden seat close by, and Bradford took her to it. Then with a firm step he went down to the gate. The boy had dismounted from his bicycle and held the telegram.

"For me?"

"Yes, sir. Shall I wait for an answer, sir?"

But Bradford shook his head. He was not a business man and rarely got telegrams. It could be but one thing. He put the telegram unopened into his pocket and went up to his wife. "Let us go in," he said.

She took his arm and the two went in. The sunshine seemed to have gone cold and dim, and the door closed.

III

IN the very early morning of next day, Bradford stood in his bedroom looking down into a trunk. There came from it a scent of naphthalene and camphor, and a gleam of red and gold. How long since last he wore it? He forgot. There was a hot hard feeling in his brain that made him forget everything. The past seemed obliterated ; only the future remained. Well, he knew what he was going to do in that future. It was clear enough.

He bent down and took out his uniform, that of a bygone age. Now they wear khaki, but they did not then. He tried it on. Yes, he had not grown fat, he could wear it still, to appear in at the War Office. He would have to get a khaki uniform, of course, at once. He would do that after. He might have gone to the War Office in mufti, as he was retired,

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but the thought never came to him. Dick was dead. The old regiment was short of a Bradford ; therefore he must go himself, to rejoin. From the moment of Dick's death he was called on. It was a pity that rules and regulations prevented his starting at once for the front, and made it necessary to lose valuable time at the War Office getting permission to go. But that could not be helped.

While he was dressing himself Mrs. Bradford went over to see her friend Dr. Kestell. He, too, was an old army man retired before they gave military titles to army doctors. So instead of being Surgeon-General Kestell he was simple Dr. Kestell, or in his own more severe nomenclature Mr. Kestell. That did not prevent him from being a good doctor.

"Can't you stop him?" asked Mrs. Bradford pleadingly. "Please try and stop him. It will kill him to go to

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London. He will not listen to me, but he will listen to you."

Kestell shook his head, his eyes almost full of tears.

"Will you not try?" she urged.

He took her hand in kindest compassion. "He would not hear. Nothing we could say would reach within him. He is listening to a greater, stronger call than mine, even than yours, and his ears are full of it."

She looked at him.

"What call?" she whispered.

He did not make answer to her question, but continued: "Did we try in any way to stop him it would be worse. We must let him go—help him to go."

"Should I go with him?"

"No."

"He may faint or die on the way."

"I think not. He will return."

"And then?"

He did not answer.

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“Come and see him off,” she said.

“I will certainly,” he answered ; “only he must not know you have been consulting me. Run back quick. I will come in ten minutes.”

When Kestell came to Bradford’s gate he found Bradford ready to start. His uniform was on, his sword, his medals. He held himself erect and strong. Only his eyes seemed strained as if looking for something he did not see.

“Hollo,” said Kestell. “Just in time. I’ll walk down to the coach with you, Bradford.”

“I too,” said Mrs. Bradford.

“No, no,” said Kestell. “I’ll see him off. He’ll be back to-night, you know.”

Bradford nodded. “Yes. They’re hard to move at the War Office. It’ll take a few days before I get my orders no doubt. I’ll be back to-night. Good-bye, Mary.”

She kissed him, and he walked off with Kestell down to the market square. At

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first Bradford said nothing. Then suddenly stopping and looking at Kestell: "Why don't you rejoin, man?"

Kestell shook his head. "We're not all so fit as you, Bradford," he answered. "I've a game leg, you know. They'd laugh at me."

"True. I forgot," said Bradford. "I'm a lucky man. I never felt more fit."

"You're twenty-five and not a year more," said Kestell, clapping him on the shoulder. "You'll make the Boches run yet."

Then they came to the coach office and Bradford mounted to a seat. A warning hoot and the coach was off.

In the train, people stared at this old man in his old uniform, but he did not notice. In London the taxi-driver smiled, but Bradford did not see. His eyes were fixed. He came to the War Office and went in.

Then came the disappointment.

HOW BRADFORD REJOINED

The Military Secretary could not see him. "Have you an appointment, sir?" he was asked, and when he shook his head, "The Military Secretary sees no one except by appointment," he was told. "You must write and wait."

They did not want him. Surely they did not want him; and he had thought they would admit his claim at once. He must "write and wait." And the old regiment?

He leaned against the wall of the corridor. His heart seemed cold and his head was giddy. Tears rose in his eyes. Well, he would write and wait. He would go now.

A sound came down the corridor and the ring of feet. Some men came down, a tall stern soldier at the head, followed by other soldiers. And Bradford drew himself to the salute. The tall soldier glanced at him and smiled and passed—

HOW BRADFORD REJOINED

and stopped and turned. "Have you seen any one?" he asked.

"No, sir, they say that I must write."

"Then come with me."

The great soldier went on again and Bradford followed. They came to a room and entered. "Now," he said, "sit down and tell me."

Then Bradford told him. "Let me rejoin," he added at the end, "as anything, to take my son's place. I do not want my rank. I want the regiment, and it wants me."

The great soldier's eyes half closed as if he had been hurt, and opened again.

"I am old," said Bradford urgently, "but I am strong and well. And age makes me all the fitter to stop a bullet, instead of a young man. Yes, I am strong."

And he felt strong for a moment, yet suddenly the room got misty and dark, quite dark.

HOW BRADFORD REJOINED

Then some one out of the mist said, "Drink this," and he drank. It was brandy ; and then the room came slowly back again to him, and the great soldier and two other officers came into view. One by his shoulder-straps was evidently an army doctor, and gave Bradford brandy from a cup. He had been holding his wrist, but dropped it now.

And Bradford felt himself ashamed and afraid. They would never now let him rejoin the old regiment, because he was ill—ill, and they would scorn and reject him.

But no, they smiled at him. The doctor said, "There, there. It's nothing. You were excited, that is all."

And the great soldier said, "Good-bye. You shall have your wish. You shall rejoin your regiment."

"In France ?"

There was no answer to this question, but Bradford did not notice.

HOW BRADFORD REJOINED

“And at once, sir?” he continued, a glow of happiness filling all his veins.

“Not quite at once. Go home and wait for orders—they certainly shall come.”

Then Bradford rose, and although they offered him an arm, he would not take it. No, he would walk alone. He saluted and went out.

The soldiers looked at one another.

IV

BRADFORD got back at ten o'clock. He was very weary, more weary than he had ever been before, and his head was bad. It would turn giddy now and then. That was excitement, so he thought. Well, he must fight it.

Kestell was waiting for him at the coach office with his motor-car that he used for visiting patients. Only he did not say that he had come to meet Bradford. He said with apparent surprise :

“Hollo, Bradford ! You here ? Why, of course, you're back from town. I've just been visiting Mother Harris, who is ill again. Get in my car and have a lift home.”

Bradford went with him willingly.

“What news ?” asked Kestell, as the car went on.

“They said ‘Wait.’”

HOW BRADFORD REJOINED

“ For orders ? ”

“ Yes.”

And that was all he said to Kestell. Even to his wife he only added : “ The orders may come at any time—to-morrow, or even to-night. A soldier must be ready. There is much to do.”

“ Rest first,” she said.

But no, he would not. He must be ready when the orders came. His Will—that was already done, but there were other matters. She must go to bed. He would work an hour or two, but she must go to bed. And so, to please him, she went away, but not to bed. She went out into the garden and met Kestell there. And, standing hidden, in the summer night she watched.

She saw him open his desk and take out many papers. Some of these he tore up ; some he replaced. It took him a long while, for every now and then he would let the papers fall and seem to

' HOW BRADFORD REJOINED

sleep a little, but, recovering, would continue.

The papers finished, he sat down again and began to write. But now his weariness overcame him, and after struggling against it for a little he gave in. He put his face on his hands and seemed to sleep.

She watched him.

Then suddenly he woke again. He raised his head as if he heard a call—a bugle-call.

He rose suddenly to his feet—stood for a moment at “attention,” his face bright with joy, and fell. And when she and Kestell ran to his assistance he was dead.

.

So did Bradford rejoin his regiment. But not in France. For, indeed, save for a few wounded, the old regiment was not in France. He found them where he went.

THE BELL-RINGER

THE BELL-RINGER

I

ALTHOUGH it is marked on the maps as part of France, and although it is divided from its northern neighbour by the usual black line on the map and line of customs and sentries on the land itself, it really forms part of Flanders. For this broad, flat plain, drained by slow, oozing streams, is in fact an outlying portion of the great Flanders plain which has been from time immemorial the battlefield of Europe. Its soil has been fertilized for thousands of years with the ashes of brave men, its rivulets run slow as streams of death. And the people, too, are somewhat of the Flemish type. They are not so hot and brisk as Frenchmen of the centre or of the Midi ; they are slower, more solid, but they are good Frenchmen for all that.

THE BELL-RINGER

The villages are usually built on a piece of higher land, a little swell in the great flat plain, and so are visible from a distance as an island is at sea. They are built sometimes, certainly the village of which I have to write was built, about a church which formed the nucleus of the village. And in this particular village, although the church itself was a new and insignificant building enough, it had a belfry that was the pride of all who lived within its shadow. For it was built in the great days of Flemish art six hundred years ago, and designed by one who put into his work his heart, a human heart that loved and beat not so much with the dogmas of a church as with the sorrows, fears and hopes of the humanity that made it. So that it seemed almost a living thing instinct with the soul of all the centuries of men who had been born and lived and died around it.

The village itself was a gay little place,

THE BELL-RINGER

with red-tiled roofs indicative of warm homes beneath ; there was a square with plane-trees round it, and there were cheery little cafés where the villagers exchanged ideas. It gave one the same general impression as did its buxom matrons, that it was clean and tidy and fairly prosperous ; and if a little commonplace, happy and busy.

And on this hot August afternoon of 1914 it seemed, again like its matrons, taking a siesta. The streets were empty. For most of the men, and many of the women, too, were in the fields working at the harvest, and those who remained were resting indoors. From the belfry top, if you had climbed up there, you could have seen these fields, mostly of beets and mangolds and swedes, but with patches of yellow corn in places, and green rugs of lucerne. Here and there were clumps of trees, poplars for the most part, and in their shadow the labourers were waiting till the

THE BELL-RINGER

heat somewhat abated. The horses were unharnessed from the wains, resting till the load was finished. Bathed in the golden light the landscape seemed a dream of peace, of immemorial peace. War there had been, but that was long ago, and now wars were no more. The scars were healed. A haze shut in the distance, but overhead the sky was deep and blue.

Even Jean the humpback was abroad. He had a little garden of his own beyond the village where he grew vegetables for himself. It was but a tiny square of land, but Jean's breath was short and his arms weak and his legs crooked, so that it was as much as he could cultivate himself. And as he only had himself to feed it sufficed for all his necessities in the way of garden stuff. For the rest he gained a few francs a month as bell-ringer, which was all the work he could do. But Jean had only one mouth to feed, his own, and

THE BELL-RINGER

he never would have any more than that one. Other men were different, but Jean sufficed to himself and always would suffice—because he had to suffice. He was only twenty-five, but if he lived to seventy-five it would make no difference.

Jean was resting now. Not that he had done much work, but because he was tired. He always was tired as far as he could remember, and life did not resolve itself for him as for others into freshness and tiredness, into work and play, into joy and grief, into holidays and work days, but into being more tired or less tired, into feeble attempts to work and long periods of watching others work. Indeed life seemed to Jean to consist for him of one long watch, a watch of others growing up and working hard and making love and being gay; the contemplation of a life amidst which he moved as a stranger without belonging to it in any way. As a child he could not play with other children

THE BELL-RINGER

and as a young man he could not work with other young men nor be friendly with the girls, so that he lived in a solitude that had no bounds.

II

IT was a little cooler now and Jean came out from the shelter of his trees. He would do a little more weeding, as much as he could, and then he would go back to the village. He stretched his limbs and took up his hoe. But before he could get to work he saw a girl of about sixteen come running out of the village. "Tiens," he said to himself, "there is Desirée. What does she want?" She ran down the path towards where Jean was standing, running hurriedly as if afraid.

"Jean," she called out, "Jean, Jean."

He did not answer, but simply stood and watched her stupidly.

"Jean," she gasped out as she came up. "You are to come at once."

He only shook his head and the girl got vexed and seized his sleeve and pulled him. "The maire has sent for you, Jean. Come at once."

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“For why?” asked Jean, resisting.

“To ring the tocsin. Come.”

“For why?” he repeated. “I see no fire.”

“For why?” she cried indignantly. “Don’t you know anything, then? It is to call the folks from the fields to come at once to the village. Jean, the war has come.”

He nodded slowly. What was the war to him? Nothing. It did not affect him in any way. Why should he be excited about it! But he was wanted to ring the bell. So he would do it. He put on his misshapen coat and started down the path.

“Jean,” said the girl again, “it’s war. The news has come.”

“Yes, yes,” he answered.

“And all the young men must go away.”

He looked at her. “Not me,” he answered.

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She stared at him surprised, as much surprised as if a gargoyle on the tower had classed itself with young men. For to her, as to all the other villagers, Jean was neither a man nor was he young. He was a *monstre*, that was all. Then she forgot Jean and returned to her own affairs.

“André will go,” she said, “and Gustave. All the young men first, and then the older men. Perhaps father even will have to go. All, all the men.”

“Yes,” said Jean.

“And many will be killed,” said the girl sadly. Then, with a sudden return of her thoughts to Jean: “Are you not glad not to have to go?”

He stopped and stared at her. To ordinary misunderstanding and misjudgment he was accustomed, and they hurt him no longer. But to such misjudgment as this, such cruel misunderstanding, what could he oppose? Even his stoicism had its limits.

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“Jean,” said the girl sharply, “you are crying.”

“My back hurts,” he said stolidly.

“Can’t you ring the bell?” she asked.

“Oh yes,” he answered. “I can ring the bell. I can do that.”

“Then I’ll run on,” she said, “and tell them you are coming.”

Without another word she left him and went on, and he followed as fast as he could. For there was haste, evidently haste. The village, half an hour ago asleep, was throbbing now with life. The streets were filled with people; all the population who were not in the fields were in the streets, talking, discussing, moving about.

So Jean climbed up the belfry stairs and rang—not the slow measured call to mass, nor the gay jingle for a marriage, but a sharp, insistent, chiding discord, that broke into the summer silence like a cry. It seemed to rend the brooding peace as it

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shrieked its way across the sunlit fields. And the farmers heard it in their stock-yards and the peasants in their fields; they heard and they obeyed. For they knew, they *knew*. For days they had awaited just this shrieking summons, waited in fear, in hope, in a mute suspense that wished an answer of either Peace or War.

And now the bell called War, and to it men answered War. A storm swept across three continents and cried "To Arms, To Arms," and twice three hundred million throats said "War."

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III

IT was the early night. The sunset had not quite faded from the western sky but still burned reluctant fires. Above the stars were slowly gathering for their watch. The air was still, filled with the incense of the night, the fragrance of the clover fields, the scent of hay, the odour of the land. The *place* was thronged with people, every window held its eager lookers-on, even the side streets were full, for all the village was abroad.

In the middle of the *place* was a long line of men in uniform, their rifles in their hands, their packs upon their backs. Commands rang out and wheeling to the right the march began, that march that would end for each no one could tell when nor where.

Yet the young men were gay. They laughed, they waved their hands; and

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then, as the head of the column passed out of the square and down towards the great white road that led to the railway station six miles away, they began to sing.

Come, comrades all,
And hear the call
That from the bugle rings.
Haste, haste, oh haste,
No time to waste,
That is the song it sings.
The enemy is at the gate, and oh ! his
heart is black.
It is his will
Fair France to kill,
And we must drive him back.
To France, fair France,
This is our glad reply.
For France, our France,
Hear all your children cry.
We'll drive the Boches home again, and
win the fight or die
As we go marching to victory.

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The reaper leaves
His half-bound sheaves,
The miller leaves his mill.
The lawyer's words
Are turned to swords,
The merchant shuts his till,
The curé has resigned his cure, the doctor
left his sick.

For hark ! the drum
Commands to come
And we must answer quick.
To France, fair France,
This is our glad reply,
For France, our France,
Hear all your children cry.
We'll drive the Boches home again and
win the fight or die
As we go marching to victory.

France notice gives
To all good wives
That duty must be done.
No matron can

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Retain her man,
No mother keep her son.
The maid her lover must resign although
her heart may break.
All, all must go
To meet the foe
Or he our land will take.
To France, fair France,
This is our glad reply,
For France, our France,
Hear all your children cry.
We'll drive the Boches home again and
win the fight or die
As we go marching to victory.

And as they sang and marched the crowd
who accompanied them to see them off,
their fathers, mothers, sisters, sweethearts,
sang too till the dark vault of the night
was filled with the strong defiant min-
strelsy.

And Jean sang too, Jean who had never
sung before, who did not know how to

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sing. The great wave of enthusiasm, of love, of courage, of devotion, came surging into Jean's soul, moving it, as it had never been moved before, teaching him in a few minutes the greatest mystery of the world. He lived now for the very first time in all his weary years. His soul had wakened, and it went with these young strong men to war. All his soul went with them, only his crooked body stayed behind.

IV

THEN began for all that countryside, as for so many countryside, the terrible endurance of silence.

A war was going on, the greatest war of all history, a war that threatened all their existence, and they knew nothing of it.

Their sons had marched away to this war, were in this war fighting, suffering, dying, and they had no news of them. They had disappeared into a great red mist that held everything. The papers were censored and there was no news.

Only out of that great red mist came rumours formless and terrible. There were rumours that the Boches had come into Belgium with fire and sword and rapine, and that they were driving down in huge masses upon France.

Every time when Jean went up to ring his bell he gazed to the north and east,

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along the great white road. That was the way the Boches would come. He gazed with eager eyes.

For Jean was changed. He had been shaken by the shock of war out of his apathy and resignation into a new existence. His soul was filled with an exaltation he could not understand, and burned with a poignant despair that was a daily, nightly agony. He began to hate this body that confined his soul, to hate, to hate, to hate. He asked questions. Why was not he like other men? Why had he been cursed from out his very mother's womb. Was that the justice of God? Was that the goodness of God? He asked the curé and the curé could not answer him. Well: he could go straight to Christ and ask him. So he went and knelt before the crucifix, and asked and asked—"Christ," he cried, "was it then fair to make me as I am? to put my soul into this useless cage? to live and die in

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it. Surely it is not true what they say, that even death will not release me from this dread deformity. It is not true the body rises again. It is not true, I say, not true, neither for you nor me. Tell me it is not true." But the Christ upon the cross was dead and answered not.

So Jean rose up. Well, he would go on ringing the bell because he lived by it ; but for the rest, No. He would not believe that the body rose again, nor in any one who said such everlasting cruelty. When Jean died he would have done with his crooked body. He was sure of that. For it was only this deformed cage in which he lived that divided him from humanity. His soul was one with the Soul of all the world. He had felt it first on that night the young men marched away ; it had come on him like a lightning flash, illuminating all his life and future. But it did not pass as lightning does. It remained within him as a great

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light, a great truth, an everlasting happiness.

So some weeks went on. The battle grew nearer, and sometimes they heard far off the mutter of great guns.

Then one day some Uhlans came to the village, riding down the road. They went straight to the maire and then to the inn. The people stared at them with fear and shut themselves within their houses. But the Uhlans only stayed an hour or two and went back again.

A few days later, in the evening, some French troops arrived and camped behind the village in some farms. There were cavalry and infantry, and a report went that there were more behind. But no one knew. The secrecy of war was over all.

Next morning Jean went up the belfry to his morning task to ring the matins bell. He climbed with difficulty, stopping often to take breath. And when he stopped

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he looked out through the belfry windows at the view.

At first he noticed nothing new. The day was bright and sunny, but a haze lay on the fields. It lay unequally, and there were open patches in it where the ground was visible.

At last he came to the chamber where the bell-rope was and leaned out of the window for a moment's rest. He looked up to the north-east over the low mist. It seemed a white sea spread beneath him, still and silent as the dawn. The poplar tops stood out like submerged bushes.

His breath came back, and he was about to turn away and pull the bell, but stopped half-turned. What was there he had seen? The mist had thinned a moment, and he saw, then again thickened. He waited. And again the mist swayed on one side, uncovering a hundred yards of road. But it was not empty road. It was crowded with grey figures, horsemen

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with infantry behind. Jean drew a long breath. "The Boches!" They were a mile away, and in a few minutes would be here. "Well, and what matter?" If they came they came, and that was all. And then he suddenly remembered the French detachment in the farm behind. They did not know. Their sentries could not see because of the mist. Jean alone could see.

It came to him like a shock that fate had given him a sudden importance, and a deed to do. The French troops must be warned; but how? *He* could not run. And the Boches were so near that they would catch any one he sent. They would be at the belfry door in a few minutes. He must act alone.

He did not think what he must do, but acted out of some volition. He threw himself down the stairs and slammed the thick door and bolted it. That would keep them out. Then he climbed up

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again, his heart beating like to burst. No matter, let it burst. He seized the rope and rang, not the call to prayer, but that to arms. The bell clanged and rattled harshly and angrily, and from the belfry tower its message went out on the still air in deadly discord. It was the tocsin call.

In a moment the village had awoke to danger. There were shouts and cries. The Boches too awoke to the fact that they were discovered and that the bell was giving the alarm. The cavalry galloped towards the belfry ; bullets began to pelt upon the stones.

But Jean rang on. Would the troops hear ?

Yes ; from the farmhouses bugles answered in alarm. They rang their challenge through the mist. Jean could not see, but he knew he had been heard. After all, then, he had been good for something. He would ring on. He

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rang, clinging to the rope as if clamped to it. He rang and rang.

And down below the thinning mist allowed the country to be seen more and more clearly. There were men in lines across the fields running and shouting. There was the rifle rattle and the rat-tat-tat of mitrailleuse. And then the angry boom of bigger guns. The morning's stillness was filled with all the sounds of anger, hate and fear—and above the bell rang on.

Down through the village street, tirailleurs ran and drove the Boches out and lined the walls beside the cemetery. On the left, cavalry swooped down across the fields. The battle din grew fiercer, but the bell rang on and dominated all. It seemed to raise a fury in those that heard ; it cheered the French, it angered the enemy into frenzy. It seemed like a furious woman screaming incoherent wrath upon the combatants.

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Then it changed suddenly. From being an angry call it slackened to a slower measured note. It became a peal of triumph. It was Jean's triumph—his. Despite his crooked body, he had shown that he was a man, a son of France, that in him too there was a spark of that humanity that is everlasting life.

The Boches fell back sullenly across the fields. Their guns retired. But before they went they sent one salvo at that belfry tower. At least they would stop its triumph.

Four angry guns rang out, four bursts of flame, and when the smoke had drifted on the bell was still, the belfry disappeared. And Jean? His body lay a crumpled, bleeding mass crushed out of all semblance to humanity. What matter? It was dead, dead, *dead*, never to rise again in its deformity. And Jean was free again.

Never any more, Jean, shall you want for father, mother, sweethearts, comrades.

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Never any more shall you be solitary Jean,
cut off, apart, alone. For you now are
one with them, Jean, one with humanity,
one with the Soul of all the World. The
body that divided you is dead.

FROM FATHER
TO SON

FROM FATHER TO SON

I

NOT very far outside the village wherein Bradford, of whom I have already written, died, there is a Manor House. It is not a great house, but, like most things in this part of the country, it is old. How old its original beginnings were I do not know, for when it was rebuilt in the age of Elizabeth the old building was quite destroyed and its foundations hidden, so that nothing now remains whereby to judge. Indeed, the Elizabethan building fell into ruins in its turn when its owner was impeached after Sedgemoor, and so it lay for nearly a hundred and fifty years. Then about six years ago a very young married couple called Ormonde came and bought the whole estate, and set

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to work to make the old house habitable. So they rebuilt and patched and renovated until the house was suitable for modern ideas, and then they came to live there.

With them they brought two servants, Mrs. Ormonde a maid and Mr. Ormonde a groom. The maid was called Joyce and the groom was called Bob. She had bright red hair and a pleasant freckled face and a jolly laugh, and was always as gay and full of life as a chaffinch, while Bob was dark and self-contained and silent. So that Nature, who makes her marriages with a view to correcting extremes and restoring the average, ordained that they should fall in love with each other, a proceeding on Nature's part which was bound to create a great deal of trouble for other people.

They not only fell in love, which as they could not help it was quite easy, but they even avowed that love to each other.

That was, of course, a very different

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matter. To this result Nature the conspirator could only contribute the necessary emotions in each, the opportunity of a summer night and a full moon, while Bob had to contribute great courage and quite a number of words. Joyce's part was simpler ; she had only to keep silence and at last say Yes. Bob got over his difficulties much as if they were blind fences, some of which he jumped, others he forced his way through, but he did it. Joyce, on the other hand, looked down and blushed and said "Yes" as naturally and sweetly as if she had done it often before—which she had not, for Bob was her first love. Then Bob and Joyce kissed each other, and as their duties called them they had to part.

The trouble immediately began.

II

“JOYCE,” said Mrs. Ormonde suddenly. Joyce was brushing Mrs. Ormonde’s hair before she retired for the night, was doing it slowly and carefully, but gave a start when she was addressed.

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Is anything the matter with you, Joyce?”

“Oh no, ma’am.”

Joyce could have very well met Mrs. Ormonde’s eyes in the looking-glass as she replied, and when they talked together at night she usually did. For they were on the very best of terms. But to-night Joyce was too busy looking down.

“There is something in your touch that is uncomfortable,” said Mrs. Ormonde. “Have you caught a cold out there in the wood?”

“A cold? Oh no, ma’am.” But

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Joyce's face became very red and she stopped brushing. "It wasn't cold in the wood."

Then Mrs. Ormonde reached round and caught Joyce's arm and drew her in front and looked at her and laughed and looked again. And Joyce, who would have given worlds, in fact the whole solar system—but not Bob—to be able to disappear through the floor, became perfectly crimson, and though Mrs. Ormonde had said no single word Joyce answered for the second time that night "Yes."

"I knew," said Mrs. Ormonde triumphantly. "My husband said there was nothing in it. He said Bob was too steady ever to fall in love."

"There is no one in the whole world more steady than Bob," said Joyce hotly.

Mrs. Ormonde laughed. "We have a great opinion of him," she said. "And you said 'Yes,' Joyce."

But this time there was no answer, only

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Joyce broke away and went to the corner of the room to get something, it did not matter what apparently, for she stood there awhile doing nothing. Her absence recalled to Mrs. Ormonde her own personal interest in the proceedings.

“But who will do my hair, Joyce?”

Joyce came back out of the corner.

“Why not me, ma’am?”

“When you are married, Joyce?”

“It won’t make any difference, ma’am, to me. Unless you want me to go,” said Joyce.

And eventually this was the view that was accepted all round. Bob and Joyce were to marry and to have three weeks’ leave for their honeymoon, and were then to return to their duties as before.

They were to have Sundays off which they could spend either at the cottage of Bob’s mother, who lived in the village, or at some other convenient rendezvous. And of course all the week they met at

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meals and no doubt at other times also. If the future should bring a complication it could be grappled with on arrival. So matters went on very comfortably for some months, and then the war broke out.

III

JOYCE came out of the kitchen door, looked warily about to see if there were any onlookers, and crossed the yard to the stable.

“Bob,” she said, “Bob.”

Bob, who was grooming a dusty horse inside, stopped for a minute.

“Well?” he asked.

“Well?” asked Joyce in reply, slipping into the shadow of the stable.

“Did he get anything?” asked Joyce anxiously.

Bob shook his head. “I don’t think so. He was gay and cross coming back.”

“I’m very glad,” said Joyce with great relief.

“What for are you glad?” asked Bob gruffly.

“It’s not for married men to go and get themselves killed in this war,” said

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Joyce decidedly. "What would the mistress do?"

Bob went on rubbing and hissing for a little. Then he stopped again and said:

"It's her you're thinking of."

"Of course," said Joyce. "He ought never to have thought of it, him a married man. Let the boys go. Well, it's all right now."

It took Bob another three or four minutes of rubbing to get his answer ready. But when it came it was effectual.

"He ain't give up," said Bob. "He couldn't get nothing at Belminster so he's going to London to-morrow."

"No?" said Joyce with great disappointment.

"Yes," said Bob.

Joyce leant against the stable wall depressed and agitated. Bob looked at her sideways once or twice; and then:

"Why don't she stop him then?"

Joyce in return gave him a glance of

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such contempt that if it could only have been consolidated it would have pierced not Dick's skin alone but a super-Dreadnought's armour.

"Anyhow," continued Bob, "what master does ain't any of your business."

That finished Joyce. She stared at him, then turned and flounced out of the stable and disappeared. But Bob smiled grimly to himself.

"They're deceiving creatures," he muttered to the horse, "but they aren't bad neither. They aren't bad," and he sighed. Then he went on with his work.

Meanwhile Ormonde was explaining to his wife.

"Belminster's no good," he said. "Colonel Rudley has orders to take only men under twenty-five. I saw lads there getting their commissions, and I was refused. So I'll try the War Office now. Nothing like the fountain head. I hear Linton got a cavalry commission last week."

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Mrs. Ormonde moved restlessly about.

"Is it any use?" she asked nervously. "You've done your duty. You've offered and been refused."

"Don't you want me to go?" he asked wonderingly.

She came behind him and put her arms about his neck and her face to his. "Jim, I *want* you to go, and I *don't* want you to go, and it is very hard for me. I want both so much—so awfully much."

"I know," he said.

"If we had a child, a son, Jim, I could bear it better. But I have no one—only you."

He patted her arm and there was a silence. Then presently she went and sat on her chair and smiled and said :

"Joyce is worse than me. She's furious with you for leaving me."

"Joyce?" And Ormonde opened his eyes. "What business is it of hers?"

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"Loyalty to me," suggested Mrs. Ormonde slyly.

"Stuff!" said Ormonde.

"You stupid boy. Can't you guess?" said Mrs. Ormonde with a laugh. "If you go Bob will go with you. I am sure of that although no word has been said. And Joyce knows and she is desperate."

"With me," and Ormonde laughed. "I don't want Bob to come. If he likes to come well and good, but I have not even suggested such a thing."

"If you go he will go," said Mrs. Ormonde.

"I don't see that," said Ormonde. "He is a free agent."

"Oh, don't you see," said Mrs. Ormonde, "that if it is proper for you to go it is proper for him. But if you stay he can stay also with a clear conscience. The onus is on you. So Joyce says you ought not to go."

"Joyce should mind her own business,"

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said Ormonde. "I am your business, Bob is hers. Let her talk to Bob."

"Oh, Jim," said Mrs. Ormonde, "she would never do that."

"Why not?" asked Ormonde.

But Mrs. Ormonde only smiled and tapped her fingers on her chair, and said to herself, "Because . . . because . . . because."

IV

THERE was to be a meeting in the village. There were posters on the Market Cross and at the iron doors and at the coach office advising the villagers that Colonel Rudley from Belminster would address the meeting and that there would be other speakers. It was understood, though not stated, that it was a recruiting meeting, and the posters had Union Jacks at the top and "God save the King" at the bottom. The village fancy-shop had a great supply of small flags, British, French, Russian, Serbian and Japanese, and young men were urged to buy these and attend the meeting, which was fixed for eight o'clock. At half-past seven Bob looked in at the kitchen and found Joyce there.

"Are you coming, Joyce?" he asked.

"Where to?"

"The meeting, surely. I've got a flag

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for you," and he handed her a little flag brooch.

"No," she answered decidedly. "Nor you neither, Bob."

"Oh yes," said Bob awkwardly, "I'm going."

"What, with master and mistress expected back every minute from Belminster? And you'll have the car to wash and I'll have the mistress to dress?"

"Car can wait till to-morrow," said Bob. "And mistress told me before she went to meet master that I could go if I wanted, and you too."

"Oh, indeed," said Joyce huffily. "Told *you*, did she? About me?"

"The man's the head of the woman," said Bob dogmatically, though with a secret consciousness that he was occupying an advanced position which he had not fortified, and which he was hardly in strength enough to hold from a determined counter-attack.

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“Is he?” said Joyce, with a sniff.
“Well, I am not going, nor you neither.
It’s our duty to be here when they return.”

“Good night, then,” and Bob turned to go. “I’ll tell you about it to-morrow.”

“Bob, you aren’t going.” Joyce stamped her foot.

“I am,” and Bob moved towards the door.

The cook, who had perfectly understood all that lay under this conversation, looked at Joyce. “Best go with him,” she whispered. “You can’t trust them men alone. Run on, lass.”

Bob had stopped just outside the door, ostensibly to light his pipe, which required several matches, and before he had got it going and was able to move away some one put her arm in his.

“Is that you, cook?” he asked airily.

A very sharp pinch brought him back from jesting to reality.

“Eh?” he said, with feigned surprise.
“Joyce! I thought you wasn’t coming.”

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“As you want it so much I’m coming too,” said Joyce. “I really wanted to come all the time, but didn’t like to be out when mistress returned. But as she told you . . .”

“Aye, she did,” said Bob.

“Then come along,” said Joyce. “Only first,” very confidentially, “I have something I want to tell you,” and she squeezed his arm.

“Well,” said Bob, stopping, “tell on.”

“Oh, not here,” said Joyce, looking round. “Come into the wood, Bob,” leading him far into the wood where no one could see. “It’s something very very confidential and secret.”

“Yes?” said Bob, when they were well hidden in the trees.

• She put her arm round his neck and so as to draw his ear down to her lips, and she whispered a few words.

“Eh?” said Bob. “’Tis true, girl?”

She nodded.

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Bob looked at her reflectively for a minute or two, and then kissed her.

“You’re a good lass,” he said.

“And now,” she said, “I don’t mind going to the meeting.” Evidently she thought the news she had given Bob would inoculate him against any danger of infection at the meeting, and she marched him off, her mind quite at ease.

The meeting was a good one. The schoolroom was crowded, and there was a big overflow meeting outside that, however, gradually drained away by some force of gravity into the bar of the “Crown.” Colonel Rudley made an interesting if unimpassioned speech explaining the causes of the war and asking for volunteers. Then a county magistrate made a speech in which he spoke of the honours won by the county in former wars, and the necessity of upholding its reputation for the future. A local farmer said a few words, and then came the surprise of the meeting.

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The chairman rose and said: "And finally, before asking volunteers to step forward, a friend of yours, Lieutenant Ormonde, will say a few words."

There was a movement of surprise in the room. Who was he, this Lieutenant Ormonde! Squire Ormonde they knew, but Lieutenant Ormonde? They looked at each other, but the surprise did not last long. Ormonde, returned from a week in London, a lieutenant now in the cavalry and dressed in khaki uniform, stepped on to the platform. He was accompanied by his wife, and when the fact that he, the rich man of the neighbourhood, had entered the army and was a lieutenant had entered their minds they gave him a rousing reception. "Now," said the chairman, tapping, "silence for Lieutenant Ormonde."

Ormonde stepped forward embarrassed, looked at the sea of faces, coughed, and then with an effort made his maiden public

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speech. "Men," he said, "I have not much to say. Only this. I'm only asking you to do what I've done myself."

He stopped, and before the response could come Mrs. Ormonde stepped forward to his side.

"And I," she said, "when I ask the girls and women to let their men go, I'm not asking them to do what I have not done myself."

She took her husband's arm and bowed. And Colonel Rudley seized his chance. "Now, lads," he cried, "there's a lead for you. Who's for their King and Country? Come."

There was an uneasy movement and a rustle in the room. People were looking at each other; there were whispers, there was much scratching of heads symptomatic of much searching of hearts. But for a time no one came forward.

I think those critics who have commented adversely upon the slowness of our

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young manhood to leap to arms and have inferred from it a want of patriotism or energy have misjudged them because they have failed to understand them.

It must be remembered in the first place that "patriotism" has never been made a cult in England, never will be made a cult let us hope. That chauvinism, that arrogance of mind which thinks itself a chosen people, that intoxication which sings "our country über alles" which other nations have at times cultivated and which has been the prelude always to defeat and disaster, has never had any root in England. Imperialism has failed. If there is a quality inherent in our English flesh and blood it is "Live and let live." We do not want to go conquering our neighbours; we find it very hard to believe that they want to come conquering us. We are not a politically minded people. We do not know nor care about foreign politics, and our rulers keep their foreign policy so

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secret that we could not know if we wished. They prefer to lull us with fair words. Therefore, when they suddenly cry to the country, "You are in mortal danger. Come and fight," the people are more astonished than convinced. They say to themselves: "Our Rulers were wrong a very short time ago when they cried Peace, Peace, and reduced our army. Are we sure they are right now when they call War, War, and demand our lives? They would not trust us. Can we trust them?"

In the early months of the war many people were thinking that—very many people.

Again, for a young man to throw up his career and enlist is a very serious step. And he is not accustomed to vital decisions of this nature. Most men's careers are the result of outward forces, their education, their parents' orders, circumstances, and not of decisions made by

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themselves. The immense majority of mankind never have had cause to make a great decision, never have done so. Yet at these recruiting meetings young men were suddenly urged to give up at a moment's notice their careers and their lives on a bare assurance that the country needed them, not for aggressive but for defensive war.

It was trying them very highly. How true and sound the Englishman's heart is the answer proved. All honour to the lads who led the way.

But naturally and inevitably there was hesitation at first. So it was at this meeting. There was a pause that grew more painful as the moments passed. Success or failure? It trembled in the balance.

And then suddenly there was a movement in the back of the room, a stifled exclamation, a little scuffle as of a man shaking himself loose, and Bob emerged from the

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crowd. He walked straight up to the platform, climbed up and advanced to the table. To the audience only his back was visible and they did not recognize it. But when he had shaken hands with the colonel and turned round, every one recognized him, and there was a roar. Then the enthusiasm spread like wildfire, and the meeting was a great success.

Bob and Joyce walked back from the meeting in a deep silence. She did not even take his arm, but walked by his side, her shoulder touching his. So they went out of the crowded market-place and down Holy Street towards the manor. At the bottom of the dip the main road goes straight on, but there is a road which turns to the right and almost immediately crosses the stream by an old stone bridge. By some unspoken agreement Bob and Joyce took this road, and when they came to the bridge they sat down on the low wall in the curve above the pier. He sat

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down squarely enough, but she half turned away from him, though still touching him. The summer night was full of beauty, and the water lapped against the pier. There was a silence, and then Bob said accusingly :

“ You wanted to prevent me, lass.”

She did not answer, and after Bob had waited a due time he turned towards her and bent round to look at her face.

“ Eh ? ” he said, surprised, relapsing into the more intimate county speech. “ Thou’rt crying.”

“ No ! ” said Joyce stubbornly. “ I’m not crying.”

“ Eh ? ” said Bob again, still more surprised.

“ What should I cry for ? ” she demanded. “ Because you want to go away ? I don’t mind.”

“ Don’t ee ? ” said Bob sadly. “ But I do mind. Joyce, lass, my heart’s just like the water down there. • It’s soft and twittering inside me. It’s you, aye, and

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more than you, it's him that's coming that I want. But I must go."

"Why must you go?"

Bob did not answer.

"Let the lads go who have no wives. Let even the married go who have no family. Let the rich go who can leave fortunes for their children, but not you, Bob."

Bob did not answer. He knocked his heels against the stones and looked up into the night.

She turned to him coaxingly. "Why must you go?"

"Joyce," said Bob reflectively, "did thee never hear a voice?"

"What voice?"

"I dunno," and Bob shook his head.

"What does the voice say, Bob?" she asked very low.

"It says 'Go,'" answered Bob, looking at the hills outlined against the stars.

"Is it stronger than my voice, Bob?"

"Aye, lass."

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“Is it”—very softly—“is it stronger than *his*, Bob?”

Bob reflected yet. It was sore work to him talking—explaining. It is so much easier to feel than to explain.

“Thee thought that when thee had telled me about him just now it would stop me going?” he demanded.

She nodded.

“But he says ‘Go’ too,” said Bob.

“No, no,” said Joyce. “You hear wrong. He says ‘Stop.’ He will want his father. Bob, you cannot leave him?”

“But he says ‘Go,’” reasserted Bob.

“Why should he say ‘Go’?” asked Joyce.

There was a longer silence, as if Bob were listening and trying to make out. The night was very still. There was only the murmur of the water, and far off an owl that called.

“Lass,” he said suddenly, “would

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thy son like to have a father he was ashamed of ? ”

“ No, Bob, no,” and she cuddled close to him. “ But he won’t be ashamed.”

“ Then I must go,” said Bob.

She cried silently. “ Who will look after him,” she asked, “ if you are shot ? ”

“ Lass,” he said softly, trying hard for words. “ Whether is it better——”

“ Better ? ”

“ Better for thy son to have, to look arter him till he grow up, a living dad he is ashamed of and who is ashamed of himself——”

“ No, no,” she murmured.

“ Or the memory of a dad he honours.”

“ Bob,” she cried, “ is it like that ? ”

“ Aye, Joyce,” he said. “ It’s like that wi’ me. I don’t know about other felk, but from the first I knew. Yóu tried to stop me.”

“ Bob,” she said, drying her tears quickly, “ I am sorry. I was wrong. I

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—I didn't know about the voice. I won't do so no more."

"Sure, lass?" and he looked in her face.

"Sure," she answered.

"It's hard enough for me," he said gruffly. "D'you think I want to leave thee and thy bairn to come? Dinnot I love thee both, Joyce? I curse the war that calls me from 'ee. But I mun listen."

"Then," she said, rising, "I will help you, Bob, and you will help me too."

"Aye, lass."

So under the seeing stars they made their compact.

V

A FEW days later Ormonde and Bob both left for their training camp, and from there Ormonde wrote occasional letters to his wife. He would have written oftener but that he was very hard worked. Bob too wrote, but his letters were very brief. They ended always : "Take care of thyself, lass, and keep up thy heart. He must be a merry laddie." There was no slacking in these camps where men were made into soldiers with a speed and a success no one would have believed possible.

At Christmas both Ormonde and Bob came home for a few days' leave, and every one noticed the change, the hardening of fibre both physical and moral, the erectness of carriage, the simplicity of aim. Those too few Christmas days will remain for ever in the memory of their wives as quite different from all the days that had

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gone before, all the days that were to come after. They were filled with an emotion too deep, too strong, too sweet for explanation. They were days without record when nothing was done and hardly anything said. The two couples sat together, or they rambled two and two beneath the leafless trees beside the babbling water. They held each other's hands and listened to the Song of All the World. Their souls were dipped in that harmony which is hid within the crash and discord of great pain and suffering, to soon rise above it and beyond it. Then they parted, silent still, and in February both were sent out with a draft to France. From the front they wrote but seldom and then shortly. They had other work to do.

In March came the news of Neuve Chapelle. The two women looked at each other. They were very near together now.

And when five days later the telegrams came they were not unexpected.

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It was a fortnight or so later that Mrs. Ormonde got a letter from the front. It was from the colonel of the battalion and it said :

“Your husband fell leading his men, and no one could have died more gallantly. His orderly, Private Hill, tried to carry him back, but he too fell. Later they were rescued by the ambulance, but both died in a few hours.”

And upon Bob Hill was found a letter which was forwarded to Joyce. It contained only these words : “Good-bye, Joyce. Mind you tell the lad. It will be good for him to know.”

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Aye, it will be good for Bob's son when he comes—for surely he will be a son—to know. There is no treasure to a son like the memory of his father. In the golden treasury of hearts where live things that are eternal there is no jewel greater than this is.

HANNAH

HANNAH

I

SOME day if you are down in Devon and you walk along a lane I know, a lane sunk deep between banks of ivy and of moss, you will come to a brown church. The church is old, so old that I think its attribution to the fifteenth century is a mistake. It seems indeed hardly to be a building set up by man at all, it is so natural to the scenery, it might have been built by nature as the tors are up above and the cliffs are down below. Lacking therefore though it is in all architectural splendour, it has more than that, it has the grandeur and dignity of complete simplicity and perfect harmony with all about it, the tors far up beyond the rolling downs, the meadows, and even with the sea. It is not ecclesiastical at all but human, and so a far closer approach to

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the divine than any vain striving after the magnificent.

About the church there is a God's acre. It is shaded by great elms and the grass that grows above the graves is very green. A part of this acre is old, so old that the stones were weathered into illegibility centuries ago. But there is a corner still left to be filled ; and if you will go in at the lich-gate and turn to the right beyond the church you will find it.

There are but few graves here and those of poor people, for the rich do not either live nor die nor are buried in this parish, but in the pleasure city a few miles away. Most of the graves have no headstone at all, for the money of the poor is better spent in buying bread for the living than stones for the dead. There is indeed only one carved headstone and that quite recent. It is a very modest stone and it was put up, I am told, by a stranger who

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also wrote the inscription. It is as follows :

SACRED

To the Memory of

HANNAH YEO

Born in this parish April 7th 1838.

Dead on the Field of Honour

Dec. 14th 1914.

That is all. There is no explanation of where the Field of Honour was, nor how a woman of seventy-six came to die there, nor why. There are only these words, and you feel that they are true. They hold a pathos and a dignity that more words could not add to, nor enhance. I fancy that he who put up the stone did so to satisfy some feeling of his own and not for her sake. In the place where she has gone they will want no explanation because they will know, and down here the tombstone is so small, so hidden, that

probably not twenty people will ever see it. It is not an advertisement but the salute of one soul to another. Ishin Denshin, as they say in Japan.

Nevertheless, I came to know the story, and I want to write it, not for her sake, nor my own, nor that of any person, but for the sake of England. I do not think England knows how proud she ought to be of many of her sons and daughters. It is a good thing for a nation to be humble and modest towards the world, but it is good also when your children love you and suffer for you to remember them, and to remember also that it is not always those who wear your honours who have best deserved them. It is good—not for them, but for you.

II

THIS, then, is Hannah Yeo's life-story. It is a short story because, although she was seventy-six when she died, she really lived only during the last four months. Her previous years had been an existence without any dominant motive which could give them that purpose or colour which is life.

Her father was a farmer, and he was twice married. Hannah was born of the first wife, and Hetty of the second. There were fifteen years between the half-sisters, and, though of the same father, they were very unlike. Hannah was always thin and plain. Even as a child she had no beauty, and she seemed cold and not given to affection. But she was hard-working, entirely dependable, and full of common sense. Hetty was comely, affectionate, idle, thoughtless, and not useful. It will be understood that no criticism is included

in these words. It was no more Hetty's fault that she was idle and thoughtless than it was Hannah's fault that she was uncomely and cold. Matters of temperament are no more under our control than matters of appearance. Hetty and Hannah did not make themselves; they were as birth and education and circumstances made them, just as are the rest of us.

Hetty had much the best of it. As a child she was petted, as a young girl she was admired and courted, as a woman of twenty-five she was married, at thirty she had a son.

Hannah was never petted nor courted nor admired nor wooed nor married. She knew nothing except by hearsay of what these words mean. She lived with her father till she was fifty, when he died leaving her three thousand pounds. Then she went to live with Hetty, who was a widow with one son, and who was not

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much better off than herself. But they lived carefully and comfortably together—for the sisters were attached to each other—for ten years, when they lost nearly all their money.

How this happened I don't know, but their ruin was nearly complete. There remained to them both only the furniture of their house and six or seven hundred pounds. Hannah was sixty, thin, hard, cold ; Hetty was forty-five, fat, pleasant, given to nerves and hysterics. They neither of them had any knowledge of anything but housekeeping in their own way.

So they decided to utilize their one gift by taking a large house in the neighbouring pleasure city of Idlecombe and receiving lodgers. It was all they could do.

And they did it fairly well. They took a house in a good part and furnished the house handsomely. Hetty was the cook ;

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Hannah was all the rest, with the assistance of a young girl. For the house had three suites of rooms one above the other, so that stairs were a trouble.

So sixteen years passed. The boy grew up and went into some pottery works in the neighbourhood, where he was an idle, jolly, reckless young fellow "who would come to no good."

Hannah was now seventy-six, thin as a skeleton, with dull cavernous eyes, but still active for her years. Hetty was sixty-one, so fat as to be almost helpless, an excellent cook, and still more liable to nerves than before.

They had a bright, active little country girl as maid to help them, called Betsy. She had been with them three or four years when this story really opens in July 1914.

III

EARLY in that month of July a middle-aged man came to the door of The Cedars, as their house was called, and rang. Hannah answered the bell and to his inquiry as to whether she had rooms to let for a month or two replied that she had. It was the beginning of the season, but by some chance the first floor was just vacant; would the gentleman step in and look at the rooms? He did, and was satisfied. The bedroom and sitting-room adjoined, and were both fine rooms with big bay-windows opening on a private park, with a view of the sea beyond. The terms were also reasonable, but— He stood and looked doubtfully at Hannah.

For indeed she was not attractive, and for many reasons he would have preferred to be waited on by a younger woman, or even by an older woman

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who seemed a woman and not a stone gargoyle.

“You do the service yourself?” he asked.

“I have a maid,” Hannah answered, “but I usually do the service of this suite myself. It is well done,” she added half proudly, half pathetically.

“I do not doubt it,” said the man, even more doubtfully than before.

“Would you prefer the maid?” Hannah asked. Perhaps she understood; perhaps some such thing had happened before. “You could have the maid, but the suite above this, which she has now, is rather high up and——”

“It is a matter of indifference to me who waits,” said the man with strict untruth, “provided the rooms are well done and the bell is answered quickly.”

“It will be answered,” she replied briefly.

And at length, though still with great

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doubt, he took the rooms. "If I get tired of being waited on by a centenarian death's-head," he said to himself, "I can always move." But he knew also that he did not like moving.

So a day or two later he came in. Idlecombe was even then fairly full of visitors, but of course the full season did not begin till August. It was from July till Christmas that the hotels, the boarding-houses and the lodging-house keepers looked to make their profit. The rest of the year was uncertain.

The man was satisfied. The cooking was good, really good, and the service was good. His bell was answered with rapidity, and though he never got over a feeling of discomfort that so old a woman had to run upstairs for him, he learned to bear it. Indeed he learned to do more than bear^d with her, he learned to respect her in a distant and abstract way. Her immediate presence always annoyed him.

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When she came in at half-past seven in the morning and brought him hot water and pulled up his blind, he always kept his eyes tight shut till she was gone. It was the same at meal-times. He tried to avoid looking at her, for there was something about her that was not merely unattractive but repellent, a something that came not merely from her age and emaciation, but from something aggressive in her utter plainness. It seemed to say : "Life has never had any relation to me but a hostile give-and-take and so I return the same to life and therefore to you. All the beauty and comeliness and pleasant things that others find in life have never been there for me, nor are they in me. I parley with life at the end of a fixed bayonet."

But he respected her. She never failed in her duty, never by word or inflection made the excuse of her age for any shortcoming. She returned in service the

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uttermost penny he paid her. She ran up the stairs to his bell and came into his room with trembling limbs but with a spirit of steel. She never asked for pity, would not have accepted it, would have resented it as an insult. She played the game.

Then came August, the rumour of war, the declaration of war between Germany and Russia, and then our declaration against Germany. It all came like a bolt out of the blue.

On August 5 the man's lunch was late and when it arrived it was badly cooked. It was brought up, too, by the maid Betsy, and not by Hannah, which was a notable thing. He looked at the omelette with disfavour. Then Betsy spoke : "Miss Yeo is sorry the lunch is late. She had to cook it herself too."

"Is Mrs. Farrant ill?"

Betsy sniggered. "She's afraid of the Germans."

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“Afraid of the Germans?”

Betsy nodded. “It’s war now, and she thinks they’ll come and cut our throats. She’s gone to bed.”

“Tell her there’s no danger,” said the man.

“We all tell her that. But Lor’! she don’t believe us. She just has hysterics. Miss Yeo’s very sorry, sir. She can’t cook like her sister.”

“I will dine out,” said the man.

He dined out, and next day he lunched out also as Mrs. Farrant had not recovered. And already in twenty-four hours Idlecombe had changed. The railway station was packed not with arrivals but with departures. There was a stampede from the coast. The bathing beach, so thronged two days before, was now almost deserted. The declaration of war had fallen into this watering-place like a shell, scaring away from it all those who had just come.

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For indeed in those early days no one knew what war meant nor the changes it would bring. The wildest ideas and rumours were afloat. There was a great battle raging in the North Sea, the coast was all mined either by the enemy or by ourselves. The sands were dangerous as mines might wash up. There would be a famine soon because our supplies would be cut. Frightened housewives rushed off to the grocers' and bought up their stocks of flour, bacon, cheese, and stored their cellars, so that there was indeed in many places a temporary artificial famine. Gold disappeared. Silver nearly disappeared, and for some days the only currency was postal orders. The banks were closed for nearly a week and no one could cash cheques. The train service was curtailed in fact, and abolished in gossip. Spies were said to swarm and many arrests were made. Local papers brought out hourly editions, with nothing

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in them because all news was censored. And until this suspense was passed every one thought it best to stay at home, or if away to go home and stay at home. So the holiday season just begun was killed, and many many poor people ruined in consequence.

The occupants of the other two suites in The Cedars fled, and future visitors who had booked rooms almost till Christmas cancelled their bookings. Only the man stayed on.

IV

IT was the dinner this time that was spoiled, and the man looked at it in annoyance.

“I am very sorry,” said Hannah, “very sorry.”

“Mrs. Farrant ill again ? ”

Hannah shook her head. “She keeps thinking the Germans will come.”

“What nonsense !” said the man. “Tell Mrs. Farrant I’ll promise to give her due notice before the Germans come, provided she cooks my dinner till they do come. But if not I must go.”

Hannah’s hands trembled. “I—I wish I could cook. But you won’t go, please.”

It was the first time the man had heard any note of emotion in Hannah’s voice, and even so it was hardly perceptible.

“Then warn Mrs. Farrant.”

“I have done my best. Her son went for a soldier yesterday.”

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“Right,” said the man. “I will stay on, then, at present.” He knew very well that he was their last hope. The other suites were empty. The holiday season was killed. Betsy had gone to London, but with only the man there was not much work to do.

“How did it happen Mrs. Farrant let her son go?” he asked.

“She didn’t want him to go,” said Hannah.

“No,” thought the man, “it was this old death’s-head made him go, I don’t doubt. She is a grenadier in a winding-sheet.”

“It is for Devon,” said Hannah simply, removing the plates.

For Devon! Hannah knew Devon, but England she did not know. She was born in Devon, had lived all her life in Devon, would die in Devon, and unless the next world was like Devon, she would consider heaven a failure. A small patriotism

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is keener than a great patriotism, because it comprehends better.

More than this the man did not know, though he guessed that there was more. He did not know the fight Mrs. Farrant had made to keep her son, who himself wished to go ; how she had reproached the young man with ingratitude, and Hannah with selfishness. "He is my son," she cried. "If he was yours you would not be so willing to let him go."

"For Devon," said Hannah.

"What have you given to Devon?" sneered Mrs. Farrant. "You are lavish with other people's family. You have none yourself."

"That is true," said Hannah.

"What do you give to Devon?" continued Hetty. "Even if William is not killed he will be ruined, for he will lose his place and not get it on his return. His future is ruined now, and mine too. It's all very well for you to talk like that."

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Hannah said nothing then, but a day or two later she produced to Hetty a bank-book and said :

“ Hetty, what you said was true. It is not right of me to urge you to let William go but give nothing myself. So I have made over to you all my savings in the Bank. I had left them you in my will, but if you let William go I give them you now. They are not much ; we have never had much to save, have we ? They are three hundred pounds. They are yours. And more, I am sending Betsy away. We do not want her now. I will do all the work, but in the joint accounts we will charge for Betsy as usual, but you shall take the money.”

To do Hetty justice she was not mercenary. She did not want William to go because she did not want to lose him. She had taunted Hannah to try and stop Hannah urging her to let William go. She refused the money. But Hannah's

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will was stronger and Hetty gave in. William enlisted in the Engineers and disappeared.

In The Cedars things went on as usual. Hetty returned to her cooking and Hannah did all the rest.

But the man began to notice a difference in Hannah. His aversion to her began to disappear. Why? For some time he was puzzled. Then he came to the conclusion that Hannah was changing. Her signs of age increased, her signs of humanity increased. She was like an icicle that melted slowly in the sun. The hardness, bitterness, and apartness from life which seventy-six years of unloved, unloving isolation had frozen into her heart relaxed. There was sometimes in her rheumy, dim old eyes that far-off look which tells of things unseen yet felt.

For Hannah was in love. Now for the first time in all her six-and-seventy years

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she felt the power of love. No longer did she stand alone in a world she did not understand and which did not understand her because it loved or had loved and she did not. She, too, at last was touched with the transforming power. Only in place of a lover who had held her in his arms, a babe who had pulled at her breast, she was in love with Devon.

Perhaps she had always held the love of Devon in her heart. But Devon had not wanted her, would have sneered at her if it had known her love, and so she froze it down with all the other loves she might have felt had any spring-time ever come her way.

Now Devon needed Hannah and she had answered with all her might, had given all she had. Do not sneer, or think that Hannah did a little thing to give her savings. It was a great thing, a very great thing, it was her shield against a

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workhouse end and a pauper funeral. Those who know will understand how much she gave. Life itself were less.

She did not fear. She was in love. The soft warm breath of spring came down into that frozen heart, whispering of things that Hannah never heard before, immortal things, making a music there that Hannah would take with her to that place whither we all return. Hannah was young again in heart. The spring at last had come.

But as a strong ice pinnacle that braves the winter storms and seems to grow the stronger and the harder for the frost, the snow, the wind, breaks and dissolves before the spring, its hard ice turning to laughing waters running fast towards the sea, so too with Hannah.

As her heart thawed her limbs began to fail. They failed so far that the man noticed it, how she answered his bell with more and more difficulty, how she moved so

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slowly now, how she pressed her hand upon her chest.

Yet he dare say nothing. Dare not insult her by suggesting she could no longer wait on him.

Only he went out a great deal, and so did not need his meals in the house, or to ring his bell. He knew it would not be long.

V

THE man turned over in his bed. How long the night was. He was tired of sleep, tired of dreams, tired of thoughts; he wanted to get up and do things. But Hannah didn't come with his hot water as she always did at eight o'clock, and it was no use getting up till eight because it was dark.

Then he turned over again, and in so doing half opened his eyes. But it was not dark, it was light. Then it was past eight, and Hannah was late.

He got up, looked at his watch, which made it eight-thirty, drew up the blinds, shaved with cold—very cold—water, and dressed. Then he went out, and he found Hannah.

She had not succeeded in reaching his floor, but lay on the half-way landing below. The hot-water jug was beside

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her, and his cup of tea, put down tidily before she fell.

Hannah was not yet dead. She did not die till two days later in hospital.

She never spoke again, but she smiled often, as if she saw and heard things that made her very happy.

So, at her appointed time, she passed as the streams pass which have been frozen all the long winter on the peaks above, and now go singing down to the freedom of the all-embracing sea.

THE FIELD OF HONOUR

THE FIELD OF HONOUR

CHILD

“**W**HERE does the Field of
Honour lie?
For I would like to know
its story?

Where is the place where heroes die
And dying win eternal glory?

“Where is the soil that always yields
So much for such a little given?
Father, where are the battlefields
From whence men rise straight up to
heaven?

“They must be in some foreign lands
Where it is always summer weather,
Where rivers run on golden sands
That heroes meet and die together.

THE FIELD OF HONOUR

“ Father, the road I wish to know
And you must tell me all its story,
Then when I’m old I too will go
And die upon the Field of Glory.”

.

FATHER

He took the lad upon his knee,
The curly head was on his shoulder :
“ My son, if you that Field would see
You need not wait till you are older.

“ The Field of Honour always lies
Wherever gallant men are living,
And under whatsoever skies
Their lives they are for Honour giving.

“ Wherever noble deeds are done,
Wherever pain and death are suffered,
In every land, ’neath every sun
Where true self-sacrifice is offered.

THE FIELD OF HONOUR

“ Not only where the cannon roar
And earth is hid with corpses on her ;
Not only by the god of war
Are hallowed the true Fields of Honour.

“ Not only gallant soldiers who
Have faced and dared the King of
Shadows,
All those whose lives and deaths are true
Lie buried in those sacred meadows.

“ And if, my son, you wish to lie
At last upon the Field of Glory,
Live on it now, so when you die
You will not have to ask its story.”

